

The character and best exercises of unregenerate sinners set in a scriptural light,

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DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BY

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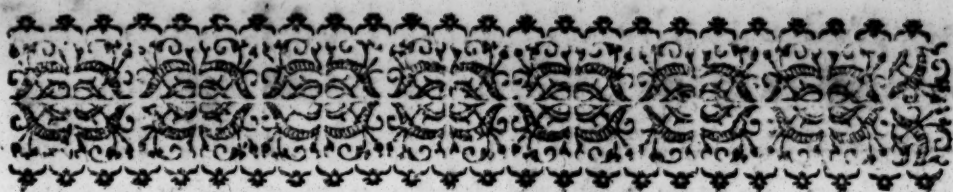
Published at the desire of many
who heard it.

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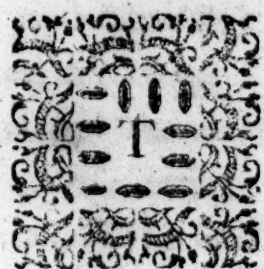
THE desire of many in different parishes who heard the ensuing Discourse, the advice of judicious friends, with the author's own sense of the importance of the subject handled in it, have encouraged him to venture it abroad in the world, hoping that it may afford some instruction and establishment to common minds in so interesting a point. He has endeavored to avail himself of the light held out in some very able publications of the present day, in support of the doctrine here defended, and has taken pains to represent the main arguments, and the replies to objections, in as concise, plain, and convincing a point of view, as his subject would well admit, for the benefit of such as have not leisure or ability to follow a long chain of close metaphysical disquisition and reasoning. Though the author thought it important to point out the evil tendency and consequences of a denial of the truth here maintained, yet he is far from charging all who think or express themselves differently from him on this subject, with allowing, much less directly espousing, or designingly promoting these consequences: he is happy in the assurance that many of them do not. Numbers of this class he greatly esteems and loves for their many excellent accomplishments both of head and heart: but as he is firmly persuaded of the truth and importance of the doctrine here pleaded for, he cannot but view the opposite principle in the light of a dangerous error. In his present attempt therefore, he thinks he is performing an office of true friendship and charity to mankind, for which he would hope no good man will blame him.





2. CHRONICLES XXV. 2.

And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart.



THESE words are spoken of Amaziah, one of the kings of Judah; and they present us, if I may so speak, with his moral picture in miniature, or give us a summary view of his character, drawn by the unerring hand of Inspiration.

It shall be the business of this discourse to explain and confirm the true import of this text, and the character given in it, and then to raise such observations as shall appear to be fairly implied in, or deducible from it.

Now, when it is said of Amaziah, that he did that which was right, the natural and obvious meaning is, that in some instances he did that which was in some respect agreeable

agreeable to the will or law of God, which is the great standard of right. A man's character and actions are right, just so far, and no farther than they are conformable to the rule of duty: and accordingly, when sacred history tells us that Amaziah and others did right, did well, &c. it conveys precisely the same idea, as if it had been said, that in some instances and respects they acted conformably to the divine command, and did what was their duty. And what greatly confirms and supports this construction is, that it is here said of this prince, not barely that he did right, but that he did what was right IN THE SIGHT OF THE LORD; which strong phrase manifestly imports that he did some things, which not only had a fair appearance in the view of weak and fallible men, but which were really right in the view of that Omniscient Being, who sees all actions and things just as they are.

THE inspired historian having given this favorable account of some part of Amaziah's conduct, proceeds in the latter part of the verse to hold up to view the dark side of his character: having represented him as doing that which was right, &c. he adds *but not with a perfect heart*; that is, his heart was not prevailingly and thoroughly engaged

ged for God and religion-----his regard to truth and duty was not universal, impartial, uniform and persevering. In short, he had not that hearty and supreme respect to the blessed God, which distinguishes the truly good and holy man from the ungodly and the sinner, and which is necessary to lay a foundation for spiritual, universal, and persevering obedience to the divine commands. The word PERFECT, when applied in scripture to the hearts or moral characters of men since the fall, must not be understood in a strict legal sense, but in the mild, qualified sense of the gospel. Men are said to be perfect or to have perfect hearts in the evangelical sense, when there is a perfection of parts, though not of degrees ; that is, when they have a sincere and governing respect to the whole object of regard, or to all the parts of duty, as pointed out in the divine commands, though the degree and intenseness of their affections and exercises with regard to these objects, fall far short of the requirements of the law in every instance. In this case they may be said to be OBJECTIVELY perfect, though not SUBJECTIVELY : they are perfect likewise in regard of the sincerity of their affections, aims, and endeavors, though very defective as to the strength of them. When there-
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fore a perfect heart is denied of Amaziah. in the text, it amounts to a declaration that he was void of gracious sincerity ; so that the real import of the whole character here given him is plainly this ; that he did his duty in some cases and respects, but yet was destitute of a holy or renewed temper of mind. Therefore the grand DOCTRINAL OBSERVATION flowing from the text is this, *

* I am sensible that this passage, and others of the like tenor, have been explained by some in a sense quite different from that given above. It has been said, that when God speaks of graceless persons under the old testament, as having done right, well, &c. he does not in these instances speak as the omniscient Searcher of hearts, but has respect only to what was visible, or to their external profession and conduct : accordingly he speaks of them and their actions, as good, when they outwardly appeared to be so, though he knew them at the same time to be wholly wrong and wicked. Upon this I beg leave to make the following remarks : First, This hypothesis is directly contrary to the plain literal sense of many inspired texts, which expressly assert, that one and another graceless man did right, did according to the commandment of the Lord, &c. but this scheme says, they did nothing which was right in any respect, but only seemed to do right. But certainly we ought not thus to evade and contradict the letter of the sacred text, unless there is an absolute necessity, and a full warrant for it from reason or scripture. The literal and most natural sense is always to be preferred to a figurative one, unless there appear plain and convincing reasons to the contrary. But secondly ; It does not appear that there is any such reason or warrant in the present case, to support this unnatural figurative construction. I grant indeed, that
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PERSONS in a state of unrenewed nature may perform some things which are their duty, or which in some respects are truly right.

There are several passages in the old testament, in which God evidently speaks after the manner of men, and not as the Searcher of hearts: but this by no means proves that our text and other passages of the like import, are to be understood in this manner. Nay, there seems to be as great reason and necessity for understanding our text literally, as there is for construing some others figuratively; for the very character here given of Amaziab necessarily implies that some respect was had to his heart; for it is here said of him that his heart was not perfect, even when his external behaviour is declared to be right; which seems to be a demonstration, that God speaks as the Searcher of hearts in reference to this man, and not merely in conformity to his visible conduct. If it be said, in answer to this, that his external behaviour was not altogether right, and by this it appeared that his heart was not perfect; it is easy to reply, that if his conduct were such as discovered that his heart was not upright, it will follow, upon the hypothesis we are now opposing, that it appeared from his conduct, that he did no duty at all; nothing which was right in any sense; for, according to this scheme, no external action can be right in any respect, unless the heart be so; and of course no outward conduct can appear right, any further than there is the appearance of a good heart; so that upon these principles, Amaziab apparently did what was right or holy, and accordingly appeared to have an upright heart; but still it appeared from his conduct that he had not an upright heart, and consequently did nothing which was right! What absurdity and contradiction is here! But it will be said, When Amaziab is represented as having done right, the meaning is, that some part of his conduct, taken by itself, seemed to be good, and to evidence a good heart, and accordingly

THE truth of this has already been proved in some degree, from the assertion contained in the text. But in order more fully to elucidate and confirm this important

ingly is stiled right or holy, by God, conformably to its appearance; but yet by considering the whole of his behaviour together, in one connected view, it plainly appeared that his heart was not sincere and that he really did no duty. But to this I would answer; this character of him which we have in the text, was drawn after his death, at a time when his whole conduct (and not merely some detached pieces of it) appeared in one full and clear view; when all the signs he had ever given either of a good heart or a bad one, were at once before the eyes of the inspired historian. Now for the sacred penman, or rather for the Holy Ghost, in such circumstances, and upon such a view of things, to give this character of him, that he did that which was right, but not with a perfect heart, is, according to the notion we are impleading, as much as to say, he appears, from a view of the whole of his behaviour, to have had a perfect heart, and yet it appears from the same view, that he had not—he appears on the whole to have done what was good and holy, and yet he appears to have had no inward sincerity, and therefore to have done nothing which was holy—he appears to have been a true saint, and yet it is evident that he was a hypocrite!! Thus this hypothesis makes the character given of this prince appear very strange, self contradictory, and senseless: and there seems to be no way of clearing it from this manifest absurdity, and making it consistent with itself and with good sense, but by understanding it according to the plain literal import of the sacred text. After all, it is readily granted that there is an important sense, in which it may truly be affirmed that God spake and conducted towards or respecting men under the old testament dispensation, agreeably to their external behaviour, and not to the goodness or badness of their hearts: for temporal

and difficult point, I propose, in the first place, to lay before you a number of plain, convincing arguments in support of it; and then endeavor to obviate the most material objections and difficulties which are urged against it.

Now, the principal arguments by which the truth of the doctrine is demonstrated and supported, are such as these,

poral rewards and punishments were by the Jewish constitution expressly annexed to external obedience and disobedience—God required of that people an outward observance of his laws, as their political Sovereign; and he approved and rewarded this with external blessings, whether their hearts were graciously sincere or not. But then it is to be observed, that in doing these external things required of them as the condition of temporal favors, they so far did their duty, and as such, God commended and rewarded it, which he never would have done, had there been nothing in it but sin. And it deserves further remark that God in requiring, approving, and rewarding this external obedience, had respect not merely, to the visible motion of their bodies, which in itself considered, was neither duty nor sin, it being something which a mere machine is capable of; but also to those imperate acts of the will or rational soul, founded on a natural sense of, and regard to the divine authority and law, which they were capable of, without a regenerate heart; and which constituted the substance and morality of their performances, and denominated them instances of obedience, rational, voluntary, external obedience to the law of God—so that in this view, God was really the Searcher of hearts, even in the character of the political king of Israel. It appears then, I think, from every view of the matter, that the literal construction of our text and other similar passages, is and must be the truth.

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FIRST, The divine law respects the external acts of the will, or those which are exerted in producing outward effects, as well as those which are wholly internal: it requires that the action itself be right, as well as the principles, motives, and ends of it; for there is a right and a wrong in action, as well as in temper and principle. Accordingly, the divine law, and indeed, every man's natural conscience, enjoins and approves of some external actions as in themselves right and good, and forbids and condemns others as in themselves wrong and evil. Now from hence arises a distinct and separate obligation upon us, to perform the substance of those right actions required in the divine command, as well as to do them in a right manner and to right ends. There is a distinct obligation lying upon us to perform EACH PART of what God and conscience pronounce to be our duty; as well as a general obligation to perform the whole; and the guilt of any sinful action is more or less enhanced, in proportion as it deviates from the rule of duty in more or fewer respects. Hence the omission of the external part of duty is in itself sinful, distinct from the want of right principles and ends: nay, though a person should exercise a good principle in neglecting any external action which

which God has commanded, his neglect would still be sinful. Now, if the omission of external actions commanded by God is in itself wrong and sinful, it necessarily follows, that the doing of them is in itself right, and a duty ; otherwise the neglect of them would not be at all criminal in itself considered, nor would it add in the least to a person's stock of guilt : From all which it clearly follows, that since the unregenerate may, and sometimes do perform such external things as God has enjoined, they may and do in this respect perform that which is their duty.

If to evade the force of this argument, any should object, that there is an absurdity in supposing any moral good or evil in a man's bodily actions, considered separately from his heart, which is the grand source of all good or evil exercises in a moral view : I answer, when we speak of the substance of a good action, or the matter of duty, as distinct from the manner, principle and end, we do not mean the mere motion of the body, abstracted from all exercises of the mind ; but we intend the voluntary choice and endeavor of the agent to produce some external effect required in the divine command : and this act of the will in chusing and executing something

thing which God has commanded, is in its own nature a moral action, and is a duty in itself, abstract from its attending circumstances, as we have just proved-----to suppose otherwise, or that there is no morality in such acts of the will, seems to destroy all distinction of actions, and to make them all equally and perfectly indifferent, considered in themselves ; insomuch that the most atrocious pieces of conduct, such as wilful lying, theft, murder, have, upon this principle, no moral evil in their own nature, any more than their opposites ; nor can we determine whether they be virtuous or vicious, when we see them knowingly committed, unless we know what designs or views the agent had beyond that of the bare commission. But what a shocking and dangerous consequence is this ! how repugnant to our common reason and conscience, as well as to the bible !

BUT some, to invalidate our argument, will object, that love is all which is required of us, and that external acts of conformity to the divine commands are right and good, only as expressions of love to God ; otherwise they are nothing but sin. It is readily granted, in answer to this objection, that love is in a sense the sum of true religion ; as on the one hand there can be no holy
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exercises or spiritual obedience without it, and on the other, where this is, it radically contains, and (when guided by a rightly informed conscience) naturally and effectually leads to the due performance of all other duties ; and in this sense all the externals of religion may be said to be comprehended in love, as they fundamentally subsist in it, and are natural and fit expressions of it. But all this is far from proving that these externals are not duties in themselves considered ; so far from it, that it seems to me to prove directly the contrary : for if there were no antecedent obligation to perform these external duties abstractly considered, they would not be natural and fit ways of expressing love, any more than their opposites ; and consequently, love would see no reason to prefer, nor would it lead to the choice and practice of the former, any more than of the latter---- for let it be considered, right affection disposes and leads to right action, and to that only ; * that is, it disposes a man to perform those things, and those only which he judges to be his duty---true love will never prompt him to do an external action, in which he sees no prior moral fitness, or to the

* I mean, when the mind is rightly informed.

the performance of which he sees and feels no kind of obligation either from its own intrinsic goodness, or the command of God enjoining it. There must therefore be a morality in, or an obligation to the outward acts of obedience in themselves considered, in order to their being proper and natural expressions of love. Besides, to say that the externals of religion are duties or good actions, only as signs and fruits of love; otherwise they are materially evil, involves the most intolerable absurdities, and leads to the most dangerous consequences---for it will follow from hence, that nothing is required of the unregenerate, which they can do while such; for if the externals of religion are required only as expressions of love, then we are not bound to the performance of them, except on supposition of love; consequently, the unregenerate being destitute of this principle, are under no obligation by divine command to do any external action while in that state *. Yea, it will follow that it is absolutely unlawful and wicked for a man, while unregenerate, to pay his just debts, to speak the truth, to do acts of justice and mercy, to read, hear,
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* *What I mean by such expressions is, they are not bound to do any thing, without a regenerate heart.*

or pray, or to do any external action whatever ; that he had much better omit these things than do them ; nay, that he is bound in duty to refrain from them ; for it is certainly our duty to refrain from that which is wholly sinful, as these things are, upon the principle we are now considering, when done without holy love. It will likewise follow, that a man ought to have preponderating evidence, if not a full assurance, that he is in a regenerate state, and in the present exercise of love, in order to his warrantably doing any external action whatever : for if he doubts whether he has a principle of holy love, and whether it be now in exercise or not, he must be in equal doubt whether what he proposes to do will be the matter of duty or sin ; and consequently, he will act presumptuously, and will stand condemned by his own conscience, if he does it ; agreeably to that apostolical rule, *he that doubteth, is damned, or condemned, if he eat-----for whatever is not of faith is sin---* that is, whatever action a man does, if he has not a full belief, at the time, that it is lawful and right for him to do it, he is guilty of sinful presumption in venturing upon it, and his own misgiving conscience at once condemns him for it

it. * This rule, upon the principle we are now examining, cuts off not only the whole unregenerate world, but all real christians who have not, at the time, entire satisfaction of mind respecting the sincerity and present exercise of their love to God--it cuts off all such from any religious duty whatever, and makes it as really unwarrantable for them to pray to their heavenly Father, or to do any thing which he has commanded, as to commit direct acts of wickedness---and accordingly, it is part of the duty of Christ's ministers to caution all such against venturing to do any thing in religion whatever, yea, to warn them against hearing themselves preach the word of salvation!! But these consequences are so insufferable, that they loudly proclaim the falsity of the principle from whence they flow: and therefore our first argument in favor of the doctrine still stands firm, and appears conclusive. We therefore proceed to a Second Argument, which is as follows

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- * *This text in Rom. xiv 23, (whatever is not of faith is sin) is greatly misunderstood and misapplied by those who make use of it to prove that all external acts of obedience done without a principle of saving faith, are nothing but sin: for it has no reference to faith, in this sense, but merely in the sense given above, as all expositors agree, and as any one may see who will attend to the connexion.*

greatest of all blessings, even spiritual and eternal life----if both these premises are admitted, the conclusion will inevitably follow, that God encourages men to exercise the most wicked enmity, rebellion, and hypocrisy, as the means of obtaining the greatest good he has to bestow. * There is no way to avoid this horrible conclusion, but by distinguishing between that which God encourages sinners to do, which is not sin, but duty, and those sinful circumstances that attend their performances, which are not encouraged, but forbidden.

A THIRD ARGUMENT in support of the doctrine is this----Many of the exercises of unregenerate persons under the gospel, both internal and external, are the effects of a divine influence upon their minds. Besides the

** Should any deny or demand proof, that attending means is the ordinary way in which God bestows his saving blessings, I might confidently refer them to the united experience of the generation of God's children; who, I doubt not can all, at least with very few exceptions, agree in this testimony, that they were first roused to a distressing sense of their sin and misery, and hence excited to an earnest use of appointed means; and that in this way their conviction was cherished and encreased, till at length in the same way and means they have been savingly converted. And that this was the ordinary method of the Spirit in the days of Christ and his Apostles is exceeding plain from scripture—See Matt. xi. 12. Luke xvi. 16. Acts xvii. 11. Rom. x. 17. 1 Pet. i. 23.*

the general concurrence of God with our natural powers and exercises as the God of nature, there is an influence of a superior kind, which he affords sinners as the God of grace. Thus God strove more than a hundred years by his Spirit with the old world. And since the gospel-dispensation is emphatically *the ministration of the Spirit*, we have reason to conclude there is a more copious divine influence goes along with its external offers, commands and institutions, whereby sinners are excited and enabled to such an attendance on the means it prescribes, as often terminates in their saving good. Whenever men under the gospel attend its external duties in a serious engaged manner, or do any actions materially good from a conscientious sense of duty, they are inwardly moved to it by the Spirit of God----it is he who assists and stirs them up in such cases to hear, read, and pray; who excites those serious thoughts, desires, resolutions of which they are sometimes conscious: depraved nature left to itself would never lead to these exercises; they are therefore to be ascribed to grace, which in this sense prevents all human endeavors. We may therefore certainly conclude that such exercises are not in themselves sinful, but right; to suppose otherwise would imply,

ply, that the holy Spirit in exciting them is the author of sin ; that his inward influences prompt men to such acts as are directly contrary to his written commands ; and that the tendency and fruits of his common operations are wholly opposed to those of his saving : but surely to suppose these things of the holy Spirit of God is equally absurd and impious.-----Which leads us to a FOURTH ARGUMENT in proof of the point, which is near akin to the preceding.

THE holy Spirit is the great Convincer of sin : hence if there was nothing right ; nothing but sin in the best exercises and doings of the unregenerate, we may conclude the holy Spirit would always convince men of this, whenever he operated on their minds in a way of conviction and humiliation-----nay, if this were the real character of all unregenerate doings, a sinner could not be truly and thoroughly convinced of, and humbled for his sinfulness, unless this were brought into view ; that is, unless he were made to see in a clear, heart-affecting light, that all the instances of his praying, reading, hearing, meditating ; all his acts of justice, charity, &c. had been so many direct exercises of enmity and rebellion against God as to the very matter of the performance,

performance, and that it would be wholly sinful for him to proceed any further in these exercises, until he was savingly renewed: the consequence of which would be, that in proportion to the strength and influence of his convictions, he would naturally be discouraged and broken off from any further attendance on means, and a killing damp would come upon, and put a period to all his zeal and engagedness in this business. But is this the case with awakened, convicted sinners? Surely, no: fact and experience loudly proclaim the contrary. The most clear and abasing views which such persons have of their sinfulness, never lead them to think that it is not duty, but sin, for them to attend means while unregenerate-----they have indeed a deep and painful conviction of their criminality in not being governed by holy principles and ends in their performances: but still they think and feel themselves strongly obliged by duty, as well as interest, to attend the means of conversion; and this sense of obligation is usually in proportion to the degree of light and conviction; insomuch that they never feel themselves so forcibly driven by conscience, as well as self-preservation, to these external duties, as they are at those seasons when their views of their
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true character and state are the most clear and affecting-----so great is their engagedness at such times in seeking salvation in the use of appointed means, that nothing can keep them from it.

I would just add, before I leave this argument, that if the best actions of the unregenerate are nothing but sin, all the regenerate ought to, and actually do repent of every thing they did before regeneration, and in order to it; of all the instances of their praying and seeking for saving grace, and of all their acts of justice and beneficence to mankind---they must be and are heartily sorry and penitent that they ever attended those very means which God has blessed to their saving good!! But is this possible? Is it rational? Do we find any thing like it in the experiences, the penitential confessions, or the standing public doctrines of the church of God from the beginning down to the present day? No---it has been the commonly taught and received doctrine of the christian church from its earliest period, that sinners in performing the externals of religion do what is right and their duty. From the whole then we may fairly conclude that the united experience of true believers and convicted sinners in all ages, agrees with and confirms the doctrine

doctrine we are laboring to establish: to suppose therefore that this doctrine is not true would imply that the Spirit of God when he convinces men of sin and converts them from it, does not give them a true and full view of their sinfulness, but on the contrary has in all ages led them to see and feel and act in a manner totally opposite to the truth.

A FIFTH ARGUMENT may be taken from the second chapter of Rom. 14th and 15th verses; where the Apostle speaking of the unenlightened Heathens, says, *For when the Gentiles which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves: which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* That the Apostle is here speaking of the unbelieving, unregenerate gentiles, is evident from these three considerations--*First*, They are represented as doing *by nature* things contained in the law, that is, by the mere light, dictates, and principles of nature: whereas regenerate believers obey the law from higher principles than nature, from principles which are supernatural, christian, and spiritual. *Secondly*, They are represented as *not having the law*; whereas the believing gentiles had the law of God, to instruct them
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in their duty, as fully as the Jews. *Thirdly*, The Apostle's scope in this passage is to prove that the gentiles are a *law to themselves*; which he argues and concludes from these premises, *viz.* That though they have no revealed law or rule of duty, yet they do the things contained in the law, and hereby evidence that they have a natural law written on their hearts, the law of reason and conscience, which by dictating and approving some actions, and prohibiting and condemning others renders them in an important sense a law to themselves. This reasoning is very just and conclusive, when applied to the unchristianized gentiles; but seems wholly impertinent, if understood of those who were converted to christianity: for these had the written instructions both of the law and gospel; and therefore their doing the things contained in the law under these superior advantages, was no proof at all that they were a law to themselves.----- Taking it for granted then (or rather proved) that the Apostle is here speaking of the unconverted Heathens, let us see how directly his assertion respecting them concludes in favor of our doctrine----he expressly says that they do by nature things contained in the law; that is, they practise many of those duties for substance, which
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the divine law enjoins---they are led by the dictates of conscience, and by the innocent affections and principles of nature, aided by a common divine influence, to do many things which are conformable in some respects to the great rule of right, and so to the will and law of their Creator---and hereby they *shew the work of the law written in their hearts*, that is, they make it evident by this external conformity to the rule of duty, that they have some notices of good and evil engraven on their minds, that their hearts do in many particulars dictate or forbid the same things with God's written law---in consequence of all which, *their conscience and their thoughts by turns accuse or excuse them*, that is, their own judgment and moral sense surveying their conduct, immediately and authoritatively pronounces some of their actions right, and others wrong, and approves or condemns the doers of them accordingly : all which laid together furnish-
es as direct and demonstrative proof of the point in hand as can well be imagined.

A SIXTH ARGUMENT in support of the doctrine may be drawn from the evident design of many gospel-commands and prescriptions. One great end which God had in view in the commands and appointments of the gospel, was to influence and

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excite sinners to an external reformation and attendance on means FROM A CONVICTION OF DUTY, and in this way to carry into effect his designs of mercy towards them. Such an attendance on the means of grace as the unregenerate are capable of, may and does, by the appointment and blessing of God, subserve some of the good ends which he designed in prescribing and enjoining them. God has commanded sinners to read and hear, to meditate and pray, because it is his will and design that they should be awakened, humbled, and converted in the way of their attendance to these duties; and because he intended that those commands should influence them to such attendance, by making them see and feel that this is both their duty and interest---a method this of dealing with and operating on mankind highly becoming the wisdom of God, and entirely adapted to the make of rational, moral, and active creatures. We hence infer that when sinners are excited seriously to attend these commanded duties, they so far comply with God's command and design, and in this respect do what is their duty.---To throw the more light upon this argument, let us particularly attend to that direction of our Saviour to the unbelieving Jews, *Search the scriptures,*

*scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life ; and they are they that testify of me :**
 this in its primary and obvious import, requires and encourages unbelievers to attend to the scriptures, in order to obtain a true knowledge of, and faith in Jesus Christ---for the persons to whom it was addressed, were not only unregenerate, but were greatly prejudiced against Christ, and would not seriously attend to the evidences of his divine mission---When our Saviour therefore directs persons in these circumstances to search the scriptures, he plainly intends to excite and engage them to look into the sacred writings, and study them with closeness and diligence, as the means of obtaining that light and conviction of his true character as the promised Messiah, which might prepare them for a saving closure with him. That this is the true meaning will further appear, if we consider that attending to the scriptures is a divinely appointed and well adapted mean of instructing, convincing, and humbling sinners, and bringing them to true faith as well as of edifying and confirming saints---and it being necessary that these Jews should be first instructed, convinced, and brought to believe, by the instrumentality of the scriptures,

* *John v. 39.*

tures, we have the utmost reason to conclude that Christ had this firstly or primarily in view ; that is, that he meant to stir them up to attend to the sacred writings antecedently to saving faith, and as a mean in order to it.----Should any deny or doubt whether attendance to the scriptures is a divinely appointed mean of saving faith and conversion which sinners are bound to use for that end, I would observe, that the duty of the unregenerate to read and hear God's word before and in order to faith, may be inferred barely from his giving it to them in its written and preached institution to be the great external instrument of their salvation. Since God has made a revelation of his will and grace in his word, in which he addresses himself to sinners as well as saints, and has appointed the preaching of it as a standing ordinance for the instruction, conviction, and conversion of the one, as well as for the edification of the other ; it is certainly the duty of the former to attend to it, while such, as well as the latter---the very institution of preaching, as a standing mean of instruction and faith infers an obligation upon unbelievers to hear and attend it for these ends. If the scriptures *were written that we might believe*
that

that Jesus is the Christ,* and that faith cometh by hearing the word of God,† that is, if God makes use of his word written and preached as an instrument by which he prepares sinners for, and produces faith in them; then surely it is their duty to be active in attending to it---the one necessarily infers the other---for it is impossible in the nature of things that the word should have any beneficial, much less saving effect, unless we read and hear it, and consider the nature, evidence, and moment of its truths with awakened attention.-----Why is the conduct of the Bereans in giving a ready and diligent attention to the scriptures and the preaching of Paul, commended by the Holy Ghost as more noble than the behaviour of others who refused to attend? Is it not because the former did right, did as they ought to do; whereas the latter acted a very wrong and wicked part? And yet both the one and the other were destitute of faith in Christ; for the faith of the Bereans was the consequence and not the principle of their attendance to the word.-----To conclude this argument, all those commands of the Bible which require sinners to believe and repent, do virtually enjoin upon them the use of those means, in and by which these

* *John* xx. 31.

+ *Rom.* x. 17.

these graces are communicated and obtained---a requirement of the end certainly includes a requirement of the necessary means---and since the means are and must be previous to the end, sinners are therefore bound to such an attendance on the one, as does not imply or suppose the other ; for it is contrary to common sense to say, they are bound to use means in order to an end, and yet they must first be in possession of the end, before they are to use the means ; that is, they are obliged by divine command to have and to exercise faith and repentance, as the means of obtaining faith and repentance ! Does not every rational mind instantly see that such a direction or requirement would perfectly contradict and destroy itself ? We therefore conclude from the whole, that when unregenerate sinners are engaged in a diligent and serious attendance to the instrumental duties of christianity, they may be said in the language of the text, *to do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.*

I now proceed according to the proposed method, to consider and attempt to obviate some of the principal objections to the foregoing doctrine.

ONE of the main objections against it is, that it is inconsistent with the scriptural account

count of man's total depravity ; according to which, human nature by and since the fall is wholly corrupted ; and consequently, all the actions proceeding herefrom must be totally wrong and evil ; and are so represented throughout the scriptures. To this I answer, far be it from us to deny, or in the least to detract from the total depravity of man as stated in the scriptures---we readily allow that all the principles of unrenewed nature are corrupted. But in what does this corruption of human nature consist ? Not surely in any positively evil principles infused into it by our Creator ; but it consists, strictly speaking, in the loss or absence of that principle of true holiness which it originally possessed. As President *Edwards* observes upon this subject, “ When
 “ God made man at first, he implanted in
 “ him two kinds of principles. There was
 “ an inferior kind, being the principles of
 “ mere human nature, such as self-love,
 “ with those natural appetites and passions,
 “ which belong to the nature of man ; which
 “ may therefore be called natural principles.
 “ Besides these there were supernatural principles, which summarily consisted in divine love---these were given to possess the
 “ throne. When man sinned, these superior principles left his heart ; and the inferior

"rior ones, which were given only to serve;
 "being left alone and to themselves, became
 "of course reigning principles, and abso-
 "lute masters of the heart." According
 to this account, which seems very rational
 and scriptural, the precise notion of man's
 depravity by and since the fall, is the loss or
 privation of the supernatural principles of
 holiness---our natural principles are not sim-
 ply and positively evil in themselves confi-
 dered; but are corrupt because they have
 no principle of divine love to govern and
 controul them--- in themselves considered,
 they are innocent, necessary, and useful---
 they are the gift and work of God, who im-
 planted them in the human constitution for
 wise and good ends, and who constantly sup-
 ports and actuates them in all their exerci-
 ses by his concurring almighty influence---
 he likewise addresses to them in his word,
 and operates upon them by his spirit---the
 whole process of this divine agent's opera-
 tions upon the minds of sinners in awaken-
 ing, exciting, assisting them, is by working
 upon their natural principles (as indeed
 there is nothing else in them on which he
 can operate;) which would be a direct
 prompting them to sin, if these springs of
 action, and their exercises, were essentially
 evil in themselves: and indeed on this sup-
 position,

position, the direct tendency of renewing grace would be to kill and destroy all the principles of nature, such as a desire of happiness and aversion to misery, that natural affection, ingenuity, gratitude, shame, and even that natural conscience or moral sense, which the unregenerate are conscious of---these would all be counteracted and gradually rooted out of our nature by sanctification, or the prevalence of real goodness in the heart, if absolutely and positively evil---but since this is certainly not the case in fact; since true grace far from extinguishing, rectifies and regulates these principles of nature, and makes them subservient to the highest end of our being, we may assuredly conclude, that they are in themselves, not sinful, but lawful; and consequently, the actions prompted by them are not evil, considered merely as proceeding from these sources: but on the contrary, when a sinner performs the matter of what God has commanded, being prompted to it by some of the innocent principles just mentioned, all the sin adhering to the performance lies in want of a governing principle of holiness---the action is not a direct exercise or expression of moral depravity; for this is not the principle which prompts him to it in the case supposed---he would have done the

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same, if he had been wholly free from moral depravity. It is true, he is still an habitual enemy to God in his heart ; but he does not act out this enmity in the present instance : even as those who are at heart friendly to God, yet do not exercise and express this divine friendship in every instance of their conduct---so far from it, that not a few of their thoughts, words and actions, are dictated by remaining sinful corruption, and so are not good but evil : in like manner some of the exercises of unrenewed habitual sinners are not positively evil, but in themselves lawful and right ; as proceeding, not from the present impulse of wicked temper, but from the dictates of natural conscience and self-preservation, from a strong conviction of truth, duty and interest excited by the holy Spirit of God. On the whole then, though unregenerate men, being destitute of holy principle, are incapable of any exercises which are really holy, or spiritually good ; yet we see there are other principles still subsisting in depraved human nature, which aided by common grace, may lead and excite them to such a performance of commanded duty as is not in itself sinful (though essentially defective) but in some important respects right.

BUT

BUT it is further objected, that it is the end which denominates the action ; and as the unregenerate always act for a wrong end, all they do must be wrong and sinful.

I answer, it is not true that the WHOLE moral good or evil of an action lies in the end of the agent in doing it---for it has been shewn that our moral obligations extend to the matter of our actions as well as to their ends ; that we are under law, and accountable to God for what we do, as well as for our intention in doing it : to suppose otherwise would directly lead to that absurd and wicked tenet of popish Jesuits, That a good end will sanctify the most irregular means, that it is a lawful and holy action to lie for the glory of God, &c.---Neither is it true that the unregenerate always act for a wrong end, I mean wrong in itself considered---their ends indeed are always sinfully defective ; but this is very different from their being positively wicked--the end which a sinner aims at, when he seeks to escape misery and obtain happiness, is not evil in itself, but only by way of defect---sinners are warranted, required, urged by God himself in his word to chuse and seek life, to flee from the wrath to come, and the like--this then is an end which they may and ought to aim at in their religious performances

formances--and when they do what God has commanded from a serious regard to this, they do right ; they obey the dictates both of reason and revelation ; and their sin in this case lies wholly in the want of a supreme respect to God's, which ought to have been their governing aim.---- Which leads to a

THIRD OBJECTION : Man by the fall has become wholly selfish---Self-love is naturally his highest, his sole principle of action---Now selfishness is in its very nature enmity to God and universal Being, and consequently all its exercises and fruits must be wholly sinful.

Ans. There is a wide difference between self-love and selfishness. Self-love, properly speaking, is neither more nor less than a benevolent affection to ourselves, a disposition to seek our own happiness :---it is a principle inseparable from all reasonable creatures, who are capable of reflecting upon themselves and their own interest or happiness ; they cannot but desire and pursue this interest according to its apprehended worth or importance to themselves : I say, its worth TO THEMSELVES ; for every rational creature has a distinct private self, and a personal interest which is unspeakably important to him as an individual, however trifling

trifling it be compared with, or as it respects the interest of universal Being. When I properly contemplate my own personal interest through the whole of my existence, I cannot but feel towards it as an object of very great moment and worth to myself; and I feel it to be right and a duty to attend to it and seek it as such. Every man ought to view himself as sustaining a two-fold capacity; the one private, the other public; in the first, he is to seek his own happiness as a personal good; a good, which would be very valuable to him though there were no system with which he stood connected:---in the last, he is to seek the public interest of the universe, and his own only as included in it; and in seeking his own happiness in this view, he acts wholly from general benevolence to the system: it therefore seems to me a great abuse of words to stile that love which the good man has for himself as A PART OF THE WHOLE, by the name of self-love; for it is no other than love to the whole system: whereas self-love is that natural and reasonable affection which every human creature feels for himself and his own happiness in his private capacity; and which indeed seems necessary to constitute a moral agent, as without it the sanctions of law, consisting in rewards and punishments

nishments annexed to obedience and disobedience, could have no influence. If Adam in innocence had not a love to himself and his own happiness as his own, he could not have been influenced by the promise of life and threatening of death, any more than if they had been made to some other being ; nor any further than they affected the interest of the whole system. In this view, all the promises and threatenings of the Bible, as containing personal benefits and evils, are so many motives addressed to self-love, and consequently presuppose and prove its existence, innocence, and usefulness. It is therefore a very great error to confound self-love with selfishness ; for this implies in it not merely a regard to ourselves, but a criminal disregard to others---it excludes true good will to all other beings in the universe but myself---So that to say a man is selfish, is to say he loves himself ONLY, without properly feeling or caring for any one else. The wicked selfishness then, which there is in natural men, does not consist simply in loving themselves ; for this is innocent and right ; but in being destitute of proper affection to other beings, or in setting up themselves and their own interest as SUPREME : and when this selfish spirit is the prompting principle of their actions ; when they

they pursue their own private interest in opposition to the known will and honor of God or interest of their fellow-creatures, so that their conduct directly expresses such opposition ; such actions are undoubtedly sinful, as being the positive exercises and fruits of a selfish wicked heart. But when the sinner is prompted to action merely by his natural good-will to himself ; when from an awakened sense of the importance of his eternal concerns he attends the means or performs the external duties God has prescribed, with a view to escape misery and obtain happiness in the world to come ; surely this is not a direct exercise of that wicked selfishness which is enmity to God and his creatures---here is no expression of disregard to other beings :---common sense at once sees and feels the difference between the two cases now stated---it instantly pronounces the sinner's conduct in the former case, entirely selfish and criminal ; but in the latter suitable and right :---and indeed, if the sinner's exercises and their prompting principle, were equally selfish and wicked in the last case as in the first, a principle of true benevolence implanted in regeneration, would equally tend to the suppression of both : but instead of this, the regenerate man is prompted by his benevolence to the
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same external acts with those of the sinner
 last mentioned---all the difference is, the na-
 tural principle of good will to himself, by
 which the sinner is influenced to these duties,
 is in the saint not destroyed but subordina-
 ted to a new and governing principle of ho-
 ly love, and has a secondary influence into
 the exercises of it.---This objection may fur-
 ther be answered by denying that the unre-
 generate act wholly from self-love. There
 are other principles of action equally essen-
 tial to human nature with this ; such as rea-
 son, conscience, kind affection to relatives,
 a disposition to friendship, natural compas-
 sion, desire of esteem &c. these surely are not
 the same thing with self-love, nor can they
 be fairly resolved into it. And though
 some of them may not be of the moral
 kind, yet surely man as a rational, moral
 agent must be accountable for the manner
 in which he indulges and exercises even the
 lowest affections of that nature with which
 God has entrusted him ; so that though the
 affections themselves may be neither moral-
 ly good nor evil, yet the exercises of them
 are certainly subject to the authority of the
 divine law ; and many actions prompted by
 them are such as natural conscience and the
 revealed rule of duty enjoin and approve,
 and so are morally right.

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for them to use means before and in order to obtain these graces, considered as gifts of God.-----Hence (2.) There is a distinction to be made between what God requires of us as strict duty, and as means of obtaining his blessings. Perfect love and obedience to God is our present and perpetual duty ; and as such is enjoined in the divine law---but this is not prescribed to any of our fallen race as the means of salvation. Again, faith, repentance, sincere love and obedience, are the immediate duty of sinners, and as such are required by the precepts of the gospel : but then these things are not required of them as means of obtaining faith, repentance, and love ; for this would be a downright contradiction. We have before shewn that some things are prescribed to sinners in scripture as means necessary and conducive to their first obtaining faith and holiness : and though it be their present duty to attend these prescribed means in an holy manner, yet they are not required to do thus as the way to obtain a holy principle : but when these things are enjoined on them under the notion of means, the primary intention of such directions is that they should attend them in the best manner they are able, antecedently to true faith and holiness

ness ; as is evident to common sense.-----

(3.) The reasoning stated in the objection proves too much, and therefore proves nothing : for if the immediate obligation of sinners to believe and repent, is a proof that nothing is or can be duty short of repentance and faith, then it will equally follow, that since sinless perfection is our immediate duty, therefore nothing short of this is or can be required and accepted by God. If to require something of sinners that is short of saving faith, excuses them from their present obligation to believe, then by parity of reason for God to require and accept imperfect holiness from men is to exempt them from their obligation to perfect love and obedience---so that this objection militates equally against both regenerate and unregenerate duties in this state of imperfection.----(4) There is still a further fallacy couched in the objection ; for it implicitly takes it for granted that because a believing, penitent, holy heart is our immediate duty, therefore nothing can be present duty which does not imply or flow from such a heart : but this consequence does not follow ; for we have shewn that there is a distinct and immediate obligation lying upon sinners to perform the external acts which God has enjoined, as well

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well as to do them with a good heart--the divine commands considered as declarations of duty, equally oblige them to both : and their non-compliance with one part of the obligation, binding them to exercise a holy principle, does by no means vacate the other, which binds them to the present performance of external commanded duties ; nor does God by now requiring the latter, in the least give up his present demand of the former ; unless any will say that these two parts of duty are so inconsistent with each other, that both of them cannot be performed or justly required of sinners at the same time ; which would be highly absurd.---(5.) Those very commands which make it the present duty of the hearers of the gospel to believe and repent, infer an obligation on them, as we have already noted, to do whatever is necessary on their part in order to a compliance with it. These commands being founded on the mediatorial plan of mercy, are designed to excite and encourage sinners to seek that grace which may enable them to a saving compliance ; and not to put them upon a vain and hopeless effort to believe of themselves, independently of special grace ; which would turn the gospel into meer, rigid law, insisting on the performance of present duty,

ty, but offering or conveying no grace to encourage and enable them to it, and hereby as effectually cutting them off from salvation, as the law of sinless perfection : whereas the gospel is wholly designed for the relief and salvation of sinners, and therefore calls them to faith and repentance, not merely as present duty, but as the appointed medium of their salvation ; and accordingly it provides and directs them to seek, in the way of its appointments, that grace, whereby they may practise these great evangelical duties, and so obtain eternal life. But this leads to a

FIFTH OBJECTION, which is as follows. Unregenerate sinners never really seek the grace and salvation offered in the gospel---for their hearts are wholly and constantly opposed to this salvation, and to the graces and duties connected with it---there is therefore no kind of sincerity in their pretended using of means in order to them. In short, all their religious professions and performances, are abominable hypocrisy and lying ; as carrying in them a false pretence of some respect to God, or desire of his grace, when there is nothing of these in their hearts.

ANSWER. (I.) The objection seems to take it for granted, that the external duties of

of religion are appointed and required by God, and to be used by us only as signs of a pious respect to him, and a holy desire of the blessings of his grace : from whence it is concluded, that the unregenerate in pretending to use these outward signs, while destitute of the things signified and professed by them, are chargeable with wicked falsehood and hypocrisy. But if these externals are duties in themselves considered, and are also prescribed in the gospel as means for the obtainment of true grace, as well as fit signs to express it when obtained, as we have endeavored to prove ; it will follow that when sinners attend these instrumental duties, such attendance does not necessarily imply a false pretence or shew of something which is not in their hearts---for surely the professed use of means in order to an end, does not carry in it a pretence of being now in possession of the end which is sought ! I grant, it carries in it a pretence of desiring it ; for there can be no propriety or sincerity in professing to seek what we in no sense wish to obtain. I therefore add (2.) Sinners may in some sense really desire the grace and salvation of the gospel. There is indeed, a desire of grace and salvation, which implies, and is itself an exercise of grace---I mean, when these spiritual blessings

blessings are desired for their own sake, from a direct perception and relish of their holy beauty and excellency. Now though the unregenerate do not see this divine glory of the gospel and its offered blessings, so as truly to desire them in this view ; yet they may and often do perceive such a suitableness in them to their wants and cravings as rational and fallen creatures, as excites in them strong and earnest desires to obtain them. For instance, the sinner who has a lively and distressing sense of guilt and divine wrath, cannot but ardently desire the blessings of forgiveness, and peace with his Maker :---the sinner who believes in a future everlasting state of happiness or misery, and has an awakened sense of his own concern in it, cannot but earnestly desire to obtain the one and escape the other. I may add, an unregenerate person may in a sense really desire a renovation of heart from sin to holiness---he may desire it from a strong conviction that his whole true happiness as a rational and immortal creature depends upon it--- he may see and feel that the prevalence of unholy tempers and sinful lusts is equally destructive of his present peace and future hopes---his moral sense also may so strongly reprobate his present vicious affections and practices as highly unreason-
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ble and deformed, and recommend the contrary as so fit and beautiful, as to inspire real and strong desires to be delivered from the one and restored to the other---for as there is a natural beauty in virtue, distinct from spiritual holy beauty, and a correspondent deformity in vice; so there is in the minds of sinners in general a moral sense or taste, which immediately approves and is pleased with the former, but views the latter with painful disgust; which approbation and disgust frequently excite answerable desires to obtain or avoid their respective objects. We see then that sinners may in some sense desire, and so may really and sincerely seek the benefits of the gospel in the use of appointed means. But you will ask what is this sincerity? Is it not a merely selfish business? or at best a mere effort of nature, which necessarily seeks its own preservation and welfare; and so has nothing in it either morally good or evil?---Though these queries have been already answered in our reply to the third objection, yet for further illustration let me add (3) There is a moral sincerity in distinction from gracious; as the learned and orthodox have almost universally allowed. Says the great *Edwards* before mentioned, "There is such a thing as what may be call-

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“ ed a moral sincerity, in distinction from
 “ saving, in many moral things ; as in loving
 “ our friends and neighbors, in loving our
 “ country, in a conscientious care to do
 “ many duties, in being willing to take a
 “ great deal of pains in religion, in being
 “ sorry for the commission of such and such
 “ acts of wickedness &c.” And I may add,
 in professing or expressing both in words
 and actions, some regard to God, his autho-
 rity and commands, arising from a convicti-
 on of his majesty and power, his right to
 govern his own creatures, and the equity
 and fitness of his requirements---such pro-
 fessions and exercises imply a real regard to
 God in some respect, and real desires and
 endeavours to obey him, in opposition to
 meer pretence ; and therefore are morally
 sincere.----- But

It is objected in the sixth place, that mo-
 ral goodness is the same thing with holiness ;
 and that between this and sin there is no
 medium : the best exercises therefore of sin-
 ners, being confessedly destitute of the least
 degree of holiness, are not morally good,
 but evil.

ANSWER, (1.) The scriptures frequently
 and plainly speak of a goodness in moral
 actions distinct from true holiness ; for they
 expressly say of one and another unholy
 G person,

person, that they did RIGHT, WELL, ACCORDING TO THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD ; that they did such things as he in some respect APPROVED and rewarded ; that some of their conduct was NOBLE, and the like.----(2.) Our common reason and moral sense concur with scripture, in pronouncing some actions right and good in themselves, as being suitable to the nature and relations of such creatures as we are, as naturally tending to the good both of the agent and the species in general, and as being fit ways of expressing a good heart. When the unregenerate therefore chuse and perform such actions as are thus fit and good in their own nature, their choice and act though not holy are yet morally good---For (3.) The precise notion of moral goodness is a conformity to that law to which as moral agents we are subject or stand related---consequently every act of the will which is in any respect conformable to this law, is in that respect morally good, though it may be so deficient in other regards that it cannot be denominated holy.---Hence (4.) The assertion that there is no medium between holiness and sin, as urged in the objection, seems to be either impertinent or untrue. If it means that all our exercises are either holy or not holy, this is extremely true, but makes nothing against our doctrine: for we have

have shewn that an action may be destitute of true holiness, and yet be conformed to the rule in some respects, and so in a partial view may be good: which is the case with the best exercises of the unregenerate. In short, though every exercise of a moral agent may be holy or sinful ON THE WHOLE, or viewed in ALL its circumstances; yet there seem to be two classes of actions, which considered IN THEMSELVES form a medium between both; I mean, those which are in themselves right or materially conformable to the rule of duty, and those which are of an indifferent nature, that is, in themselves neither commanded nor forbidden---now many of the exercises of sinners fall under one or the other of these denominations; and therefore the above assertion as applied to such acts, is not true.

LASTLY, it is objected that our doctrine leads to dangerous consequences; that it tends to blind men's eyes to their real sinfulness and misery, to nourish their pride and self-righteousness, to strengthen their false hopes, and in a word, to give them quiet of mind short of Christ and true holiness.

ANSWER; Our doctrine does not tend to blind men's eyes to their real sinfulness and misery; for it allows the total depravity of
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man as stated in the Bible, and as it has been generally understood in the christian church--- it allows the best exercises of natural men to be destitute of holiness, and that they are continually to blame for not having and exercising a holy principle in all their actions, and in short, for every defect, omission, and exercise which is contrary to the divine law. It has therefore in it every desirable advantage for impressing a conviction of sin on men's consciences.--- It also directly tends to engage them to a diligent attendance to the means of instruction and conviction, which is surely the most likely way to obtain a true knowledge and sense of their character and state : whereas the opposite doctrine, by teaching that they are not bound by any command to attend these means while unregenerate, and that such attendance is wholly sinful, directly tends to discourage and hinder them from it, and to quiet them in a careless neglect of all the means of conviction and duties of religion---yea, it tends to confirm them in the most presumptuous and ruinous courses of wickedness, not only as this is the natural consequence of such neglect, but as it leads them to think that all external actions as performed by them, stand upon the same footing ; are equally and wholly vicious ;
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and in themselves considered are all equally and perfectly indifferent. I know it is said, this doctrine, that the unregenerate do nothing but sin in all their exercises, tends to awaken in them such a sense of their awful guilt and misery, as will make them earnest and engaged in the use of means ; and that nothing else will bring them to this. But is it not highly absurd to say, that those will be excited to the greatest earnestness in attending means, who are convinced that their so doing is wholly sinful, and who at the same time have an awakened and distressing sense of sin, in its unreasonableness and deformity, and its deserved and terrible consequences ? will not such a sense naturally and powerfully deter them from venturing upon that which they view in a light so dreadful ? And will it not be impossible to persuade them in such a case, that they have any reasonable encouragement to use means, that is, to commit sin, as the way to obtain divine mercy and eternal life ? If such persons then are engaged to an earnest attendance on means, must it not be said that they are led to it by such a strong sense of duty and interest as for the present gets the better of their professed speculative belief, and impels them to act directly contrary to it ? These things considered, let the
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impartial judge which doctrine throws the greatest obstacles in the way of conviction of sin. But this matter will receive still further light in our replies to the other charges stated in the objection---Therefore (2.) Our doctrine does not nourish pride and self-righteousness : for though it asserts that the unregenerate may in some respects do right, yet it ascribes this to a divine preventing influence assisting and prompting them to it---though it asserts they do well in attending God's appointed means, yet it is far from directing or encouraging them to this attendance under the notion of atoning for their guilt or recommending themselves hereby as suitable or worthy objects of divine favour, or entitling themselves to any certain promise of salvation or special grace ; or as if these performances had any true holiness in them, or any efficacy in themselves to produce or acquire it, or would in any measure compensate the want or answer in the room of it---How then does it feed a proud and self-righteous spirit ? Will it be said that to direct sinners to do duties before faith under any notion whatever, is in effect to encourage them to depend on their own righteousness ; as they will naturally and unavoidably put an undue trust in such doings, and so will be led away further from

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Christ and gospel grace ? But this is surely a great mistake, to suppose a serious and earnest attendance on appointed means tends to strengthen a spirit of proud self-dependance ; for the very reverse is the truth---an earnest attention, for instance, to the word of God, to the spiritual and extensive requirements of the divine law, to the soul-humbling and God-exalting doctrines of the gospel, directly tends by the divine blessing, to beat down the self-righteous confidence of sinners, by giving them a just and affecting view of the error, sinfulness, and danger of it, and the reasonableness and necessity of their humbling themselves at God's feet. An engaged attendance on the means of light and grace tends also to keep the conscience more wakeful and sensible, and so prevents its resting or trusting in duties---in this way too sinners are led to make a thorough experiment of their own strength and righteousness, by earnestly exerting the one, and flying to the other for relief : and as nothing teaches like experience, they are hereby more effectually taught than ever, that their own strength is but weakness, their righteousness but filthy rags, their hearts exceeding vile and hard, and every refuge short of Christ deceitful and vain. " Tis therefore quite a wrong notion (says Mr. Edwards)

Edwards) that some entertain, that the more they do, the more they shall depend on it : whereas the more they do, or the more thorough they are in seeking, the less will they be likely to rest in their doings, and the sooner will they see the vanity of all they do. So that persons will exceedingly miss it, if ever they neglect to do any duty either to God or man, under a notion of its exposing them to trust in their own righteousness." In short, those are usually most under the power of a self-righteous spirit, who go on in a careless neglect, or a slack and dull performance of the duties of religion. But to say, that those means and endeavours which God has prescribed for the conviction, humiliation, and conversion of sinners, cannot be used by them in any case without promoting pride and self-dependence, and so opposing and helping to frustrate the very design of their appointment, is a high reflection on the divine wisdom in prescribing them.-----What has been said may help us to conclude (3.) That our doctrine does not tend to strengthen the false hopes of men and so give them peace short of Christ and real holiness : for we have seen that the genuine influence of it is to demolish those vain hopes which arise from ignorance, error and pride ; which
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are built on a false conceit of their own strength or goodness. To which let me add, our doctrine carefully distinguishes between moral goodness and spiritual, between the best exercises and attainments of natural men, and those which imply true grace or holiness; which directly tends to alarm and convince all sorts of sinners and hypocrites, and dash to pieces their brightest hopes. There is reason to think that thousands are daily and fatally deluding themselves by mistaking the effects of common grace, and those religious exercises which are good in themselves, for true gospel-holiness. Now our doctrine strikes at the root of this destructive error, by shewing distinctly how far men may go in that which is truly right, and yet be destitute of a perfect or renewed heart; by shewing that persons utterly void of holiness, may be and have been the subjects and agents of many things both internal and external, which they were conscious were not positively evil, but in some important respects good; and therefore that such experiences and exercises are no evidence of saving grace, or just foundation of hope. How powerfully does this view of things tend to search and detect every species of self-delusion, to kill every false hope, to hinder the sinner from resting

in any thing short of true faith and holiness ! Whereas the contrary doctrine by denying any thing to be right short of real holiness, and by confounding all unregenerate men and all their exercises together into one promiscuous mass of abominable selfishness and wickedness, has a direct tendency to strengthen multitudes in a false and soul-destroying hope---it naturally leads many a sinner to reason and conclude thus in his own favor, “ If all the unregenerate world are thus directly selfish and wicked in all their exercises and aims, I certainly do not belong to that class, for my conscience bears witness for me that I have in some instances done right, have acted from a different and better principle than direct enmity to God and the universe. If natural men are guilty of abominable hypocrisy and mockery in all their religious services, I may comfortably conclude that I am not of that number ; for I feel and know that I have been and am engaged and earnest in the duties of religion, from a deep conscientious sense of moral obligation, and a real and strong desire to obtain divine mercy and grace. In short, if there be no medium between holy exercises and those which are positively sinful, I must conclude that mine in some instances are really holy ; for I am sure that
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some of the exercises of my mind and actions of my life are not morally evil." Thus this doctrine tends to lead thousands of wretched sinners into the false conclusion, that they are in a converted and safe estate: and others who are not strengthened by it in such a destructive hope, will yet feel themselves so much injured by the unjust representation it gives of human depravity, as will tend greatly to prejudice their minds against the real truth in this matter, and bar them against that conviction of their sinfulness which is just and necessary--- Whereas our doctrine, if untrue, could have no worse effect, than to lead some into a false conceit of a partial moral goodness in some of their exercises, which however, they are taught to view as falling essentially short of spiritual saving goodness and so not at all to be rested in as any evidence or security of their salvation---a very harmless mistake this, compared with that which fixes sinners down in a false confidence that they are in a regenerate state, and so gives them rest short of saving conversion and holiness!

LET me then, as the proper IMPROVEMENT of the whole, caution all who hear or read this discourse, against deceiving themselves, by mistaking those religious experiences and performances which are compatible

patible with an unrenewed mind, for signs of saving grace. If you find yourselves destitute of that *perfect heart*, that DIVINE LOVE, which discriminates the real christian from all other characters, rest not a moment in such a state ; but earnestly seek that new heart which God alone can give, and for which *he will be enquired of by you*. To this end attend all the instituted means of conviction and conversion--read, hear, meditate, pray--compare your hearts and lives with the Bible---But do not place these endeavours in the room of Christ's righteousness, or so rest in them as to defeat the end of their appointment--but attend divine institutions with a desire of obtaining that further light and influence which may lead you to a saving closure with the Redeemer. The authority and grace of the infinite God, the worth of your perishing immortal souls, the alluring glories of Heaven, and the flaming terrors of Hell, all conspire to urge your immediate attention to these things. And if you will go on in a careless and final neglect of them, your blood will be upon your own heads--and God will be just and glorious in your aggravated and eternal ruin. Strive then, immediately and earnestly strive to enter in at the strait gate : for *behold now is the accepted time ; behold now is the day of salvation.*—23 JY 68

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